



Six hydro 350 class hydroplanes fly around the track.

'Thunder on the Niagara': Man, machine and the Mighty Niagara

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Contributing Writer

Man and machine once again met on the mighty Niagara River for the annual running of the "Thunder on the Niagara" hydroplane racing event this past weekend – and what a weekend it was!

Veteran boat racer Lyle Dinsmore of Grand Island and his vintage hydroplane, Miss Gangway, opened the show, zooming past

the thousands of spectators gathered along the shoreline at Gratiwick Park in North Tonawanda for the popular event. Dinsmore was accompanied by Pat Obed and the Midnight Miss, another vintage hydroplane out of New Hampshire. Miss Gangway was built in 1971 by hydroplane pioneer boat-builder Henry Lauterbach and purchased by Dinsmore in 2011.

"Thunder on the Niagara" Chairman Gary Roesch of Grand Island, in a post-event interview, said that it was once again a very successful year. He estimated that, on Saturday, there were about 5,000 attendees; and on Sunday, another 3,500 people attended the event. There were a total of 60 boats running in four different classes for a total of 25 heats that were completed over two days.

"The Grand Island Navy," a group of hometown boat owners, race drivers and crew from Grand Island, was there in full



A GP 50 Freedom hydroplane, driven by Ken Brodie II, at "Thunder on the Niagara."

force and captured the crowd's attention with fast heats, but did not capture as many trophies as were hoped for.

These included the Cents Less team: Ken Brodie II, piloting GP:50 Freedom; his son, Ken Brodie III, in his rookie venture at the "Thunder on the Niagara"; and driver Eddie Kanfoush. Other Grand Island participants included hydroplane owner Greg Barker and Hydro-Fish crew member Mike Geblein.

And it was women against the Mighty Niagara for two drivers listed in the standings: Sherri Diabo in the 2.5-liter class, competing for the Diabo Hydroplane Racing Team; and Stephanie Blain, driving Canada Girl in the F 2500 class.

The crowd favorite is traditionally the grand prix finale, the last event on Sunday, featuring the biggest, fastest boats in the weekend competition. Engine trouble winnowed down the field for the finale from six to five, and then down

to just three boats when brothers Jack and Ken Lupton from New Zealand – who started strong, but eventually faltered – had to drop out early in the contest. The winner of the big event was GP-35, driven by Bobby Kennedy.

Mechanical problems kept Ken Brodie II and his hydroplane, GP:50 Freedom, out of the grand prix finale. His crew worked all night to get the engine up and running, but it didn't make it to the biggest race of the weekend.

"It needed a little more TLC than we were able to give it last night," Brodie said. "It wasn't for a lack of trying." He said he and the team tried to do the best that they could for owner Don Less and for the fans.

Brodie had a strong showing as a leader in a number of heats, especially one in which he led for the whole race until the last corner, when the engine sputtered out.

But he was philosophical about the situation as he spoke

to spectators before the finale, in an interview with the hydroplane race announcer.

"Certainly not where I wanted to be for the last race," Brodie said. "I wanted to be in the final with these guys. The good news is, you've got five really fast boats for the fans that have hung around. In another 10 minutes, we're going to put on a heck of a show."

And, judging by the big crowd that stayed until the end, it was a heck of a show.

Results for "Thunder on the Niagara" can be found at:

https://hrlhydroplane.com/en/site_de_course/north-tonawanda-2/. More information on the event and other hydroplane racing throughout the U.S. can be found on the Hydroplane Racing League homepage, <https://hrlhydroplane.com/en/>.

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